

Western Prairie

Considerations for Planning and Management

The following information summarizes ecological and recreational considerations for planning and management in the Western Prairie Ecological Landscape (WP EL). This section provides a summary of the types of information the department uses to inform master planning decisions. Information is sourced from numerous documents, including primarily from the Ecological Landscapes of Wisconsin: an assessment of ecological resources and a guide to planning sustainable management (WDNR 2015) and the Wisconsin Wildlife Action Plan (WDNR 2015).

The master planning process takes both ecological and recreational considerations into account. The two may seem mutually exclusive at times, but they are closely connected: outdoor recreation on a property are shaped by the property's ecological characteristics. Thus the ecological information presented here influences both resource management planning and recreation planning on DNR properties.

Ecological Considerations

Considering Species of Greatest Conservation Need

The Wisconsin Wildlife Action Plan identifies ecological priorities within each Ecological Landscape. Priorities represent the natural communities in each Ecological Landscape that are most important to the Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN). This concept is represented by the gray highlighted "ecological priorities" section shown in the center of Figure 1. SGCN are native wildlife species with low or declining populations that are most at risk of no longer being a viable part of Wisconsin's fauna. The priorities can also be used to determine which natural communities provide the most habitat for SGCN and rare plants.

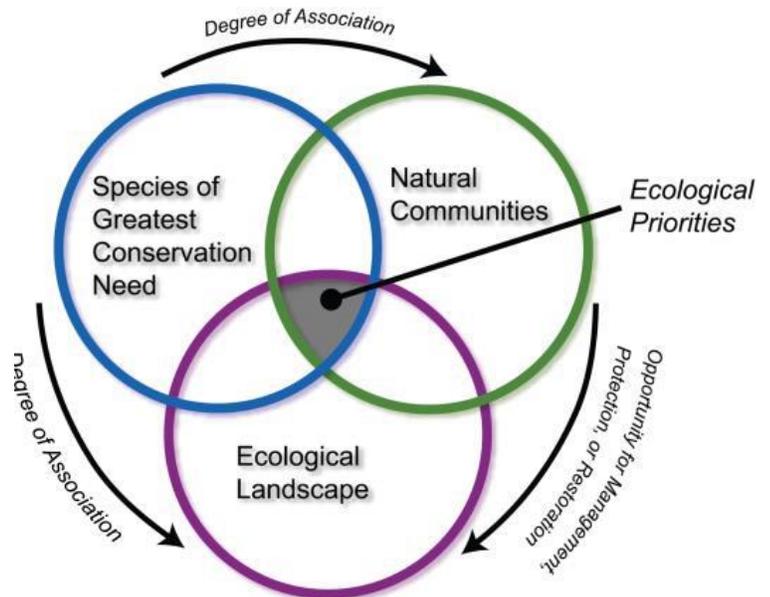


Figure 1: Illustration of the process used to identify Ecological Priorities in the Wisconsin Wildlife Action Plan

The Wisconsin Wildlife Action Plan identifies Conservation Opportunity Areas in Wisconsin that contain ecological features, natural communities, and/or SGCN habitat. These are areas for which Wisconsin has a unique responsibility for protecting. The Wisconsin Wildlife Plan areas indicates there are three state terrestrial opportunity areas: the Kinnickinnic River Gorge, the Lower St. Croix Uplands, and prairie potholes. The continental aquatic opportunities are listed as the Lower St. Croix River and Apple River. For detailed information specific to the Western Prairie Ecological Landscape, please see the Wildlife Action Plan (WDNR 2015b).



Rare Animals and Plants

Wisconsin's Natural Heritage Inventory (NHI) Working List include those species that are listed either at the Federal or State level. As of July 2018, NHI documented 29 rare species in the Western Prairie Ecological Landscape including twenty plants, 3 herptiles, 3 invertebrates and 1 mammal.

Natural Communities

Dolomite and sandstone cliffs are common in the gorges formed by the rivers such as the Apple and Kinnickinnic. "Weeping" dolomite cliffs discharge groundwater and support unique plant communities. Exposures of sand or mud along some of the rivers are used by nesting and basking turtles, resting and foraging birds and a few specialized vascular plants.

The Lower St. Croix River is among the biologically richest rivers in Wisconsin and has exceptionally high values for freshwater mussels and supporting a diverse fishery. Wetlands within the St. Croix River floodplain include marshes, wet prairies, and bottomland hardwoods that are used heavily by resident and migratory birds. Other significant rivers and streams include the Apple, Kinnickinnic, and Willow. These streams combine to provide a wide range of habitats representing all the major stream community groups of Wisconsin. Three segments of the Kinnickinnic, one segment of the Apple River and six segments of the Willow River are classified as Exceptional Resource Waters (ERW). Waterways classified as ERW are those that have good water quality, support valuable fish and wildlife communities and provide unique recreational opportunities.

Recreation Considerations

The proximity of this ecological landscape to the Twin Cities metropolitan area has intensified the pressure for recreational opportunities on the existing state-owned properties in the WP EL. The steadily increasing population base and subsequent development in the WP counties is increasing recreational demands. Additionally, this EL has a lower percentage of land in public ownership than the fifteen other landscapes in the state. This poses a challenge to accommodate a rapidly increasing user base with a small base of public property availability.

Recreational needs and shortages have been identified for this landscape through a recent Recreational Opportunities Analysis (ROA). Additional opportunities for bicycling, camping, water access for canoeing and kayaking, and hiking were identified as some of the potential considerations during the property master planning process.





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